Veiling and denying the past: the dialogue in families of Holocaust survivors and families of Nazi perpetrators

Rosenthal, Gabriele

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Veiling And Denying The Past

The Dialogue In Families Of Holocaust Survivors And Families Of Nazi Perpetrators

GABRIELE ROSENTHAL

Between 1992-1996 I was in charge of a research project in Germany and Israel sponsored by the German Research Association.[1] My colleagues and I examined three generations of Jewish and non-Jewish German and Israeli families.[2] The specific focus of our study lay in comparing different family constellations based on whether the first generation could be categorized as victims, perpetrators, or Nazi-followers during the Nazi period. Primarily from a sociological perspective we examined how family histories that differ biographically after 1945 – in Israel, in West Germany and in former East Germany – affect the process of transmitting the family past from one generation to the next. We looked at the process of how family history is passed down through the generations in three generations of Jewish and non-Jewish German and Israeli families. The general empirical question was: How do three generations of families live today with the family and the collective past during the Nazi period? What influences does this past of the first generation, and their own ways of dealing with it, have upon the lives of their offspring?

Besides having interviewed individual members of different generations, we interviewed 38 families. In each family we conducted narrative-biographical interviews of at least one member per generation. Following the individual interviews we conducted family interviews in order to examine the dynamics within family dialogue.[3]

The study showed clearly, how much the descendants of families of survivors, as well as of Nazi perpetrators, the children and grandchildren in their lives, their psychic feeling and their biographical choices are influenced by the family past.[4] As a sociologist I took for granted that one's own socialization was more influential than the family past. However, our empirical comparison of families from West Germany, East Germany, and Israel proved the structural differences inherent in the family dialogue, with regard to National Socialism, resulted less from differing socialization processes after 1945 but more from pre-1945 differences. That is: These pasts have a far greater impact on the biographer's orientational deep structure than the family history after 1945, be it in Israel, in West Germany or under socialism in former East Germany. In consequence this means *that* certain events in family history burdening the family system and the individual family members – even when they happened before one's lifetime – can have a stronger impact on the current family dynamics and the biographies of descendants than the fact of being socialized in different social systems.

In the following, I shall focus on just one aspect of our research. I shall examine the similarities but also the structural differences between:

1. The family dialogue of survivors' families and families of perpetrators.

2. The transgenerational impact on the second and third generation of survivors vs. on the children and grandchildren of Nazi-perpetrators. The two levels of analysis are the family system, as well as the level of the single biographies.

The family dialogue in a family of Nazis[5]

In order to get some insight into the family dynamics of the family of a perpetrator I will ask you to imagine the following situation[6]: We are in 1959. In a West German school, the 14 year old Ulrike Sonntag[7] learns about the subject persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. After school she goes home very much upset, eager to know what her parents had been doing at that time, she tries to make her father talk to her about it. She wants to know more about his past in the Third Reich. She doesn't know much about it, only that her father, who is an architect by profession, worked as a government building inspector during the Third Reich. Besides this, there is one fact which in this family gave cause to suspect that Mr Sonntag was implicated in Nazi crimes. Between 1946 and 47 – that means after WWII – he was imprisoned for nine month on charges of crimes against humanity, alternately by the French occupying forces in Württemberg and also the US military authorities in the former concentration camp of Dachau.

In the family dialogue, the Sonntags have established the myth that Otto was imprisoned because of a confusion of names. And when the military authorities realized this after nine months Otto was released from internment. In the family, Otto is stylized as the victim of occupying forces whose research was wrong. However, according to archive information, Mr Sonntag initially worked as a government building inspector (promoted in 1942) and, from 1944 on, as a government building surveyor in the service of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) in the Munich Luftgaukommando (District Air Force Commando Unit).[8] Neither he, nor his wife, nor any other family member mention the time that he spent in the Munich area during the war.

Back to the situation when Ulrike talks with her father. She asks him what he had known about the persecution of Jews during that time. Her father gets very upset, feels unjustly accused and starts to argue about the 'war guilt of the Jews' – like (in his words,): 'This unmastered problem of the Jews actually led to the World War.'[9] Ulrike insists on her question, and her father says: 'we couldn't realize what happened to the Jews'. He even drops the remark: 'You would have done it too.'[10] This accusation, which indirectly admits that in fact he did do something, had the effect that until today, Ulrike is unsure to what extent she, too, might be susceptible to National Socialist values in a certain social situation. From this conversation on, and ever since the time she learned about the Holocaust in school, Ulrike has suffered from sleeping disorders and depressions.

In the interview with her, when she talks about her conversation with her father when she was fourteen, she expresses her need to protect her father and give up asking him such threatening questions. She begins to cry, asks for a break in the interview and leaves the room. Returning from the adjoining room somewhat more composed, she tells the interviewer that she did not know how she would react if she knew that her father had been actively involved in the annihilation of Jews. She adds that she could understand people who simply cannot believe that their parents had

an active part in the crimes. She says that she herself never dared ask her father whether he was actively involved.

Instead of questioning the past of her father she – like her brother – is tormenting herself with the question of her own potential to perpetrate such crimes. Instead of facing her father's possible guilt, she and her brother suffer from guilt feelings of their own. This mechanism is often observed in sons and daughters of Nazi perpetrators, who generally do not ask themselves the question of guilt.

Passing the guilt on to the children and grandchildren and blaming them when they start to ask unpleasant questions, was something we could also observe very clearly in the case of the grandson Uli Sonntag (born in 1971), who is the son of Otto and Frieda's son. Today, more than 30 years later (after his aunt first questioned his grandfather) Uli has taken the role of the one to ask uncomfortable and disturbing questions in the family. In direct conversations, but mostly in letters to his grandfather, Uli is searching for answers to his question: Why was the grandfather imprisoned in Dachau? But the grandfather refuses to give him any answers. Instead, he gives lectures full of Nazi ideology and sends Uli copies of articles from extremely right-wing newspapers. In one of his letters, the grandfather writes how sad he feels about all the accusations from Uli, blames him for producing sick fantasies and for threatening the trust relationship and the love between them. The effect of these accusations is that Uli is tormented by guilt feelings – and again and again he asks himself if he has wrong suspicions and whether he falsely accuses his grandfather, and he doubts his own perceptive faculty.

At this point, again, I would like to lead you into one situation in the family dialogue. Imagine the following situation[11]: Uli decides to visit the grandparents in order to talk with them about their past. In the conversation he tries hard to motivate his grandfather to admit his crimes. The grandpa grows furious, accuses his grandson of using Nazi methods and staging an interrogation in the manner of the Nazi secret police (Gestapo). The grandmother again insists on the myth of the confusion of names, while the grandfather repeatedly (again and again) claims that: 'It was somebody else; it was not me.' After a while, the grandfather leaves the room for some minutes, going to the washroom, comes back and says: 'I will tell him now.' The grandmother is very upset, interrupts the grandfather and says: 'No, this you will not do.' In the following night Uli stays in his grandparents' house and is extremely frightened. He is tormented by the fantasy that his grandfather might shoot him because he is on to his past and is beginning to dissolve the bonds of loyalty towards his grandfather. Full of fear, he barricades himself in his room. After this Uli tried hard to motivate his father and his grandparents for a family interview with us. Several times dates were fixed but always cancelled on short notice. The grandparents as well as their son Eberhard were afraid to open the dialogue; were ambivalent about their defense. The grandfather feels precisely how his grandson suffers from the past. This is why he agreed upon an interview. But he only agreed to be interviewed for a maximum of three hours, and he refused to take part in a second one. Also his wife, Frieda Sonntag, tried to interfere with our wish to interview her husband a second time.

But let's return to the two reconstructed situations. The two situations, which took place in 1959 and 1996, show us very clearly several substantial mechanisms in the dialogue about the Nazi time in families of Nazi-perpetrators:

1. The Nazi past of the grandparents is made into a *family secret*.[12] However, in this family like in other families – the grandparents do not keep silent about it – as literature has so often stated – but they manifestly deny it, all the while dropping hints of an actual involvement in the crimes. Along with the denying and the arguments of justification there are traces of the concrete family past, which are transmitted to the descendants. And often they do not realize this on a conscious level. In other words: When the children and grandchildren argue that they have no knowledge of the family past in Nazi Germany – and this is a general argument in Germany – this does not mean that they do not have an unconscious knowledge about the past. Very often they have a hunch of the hidden parts of the past, and also they act out the family past in their biographies.
2. In the process of institutionalizing the discourse of justification, the strategies of *assigning guilt to others* and of constructing a victim family biography play a very important role. Instead of facing the crimes committed by the Nazis and the Wehrmacht (the Nazi-Army), a lot of German bystanders and especially perpetrators of Nazi-Germany, portray themselves as members of the 'collective of victims'. They present detailed stories of the painful experiences they went through during the war and in the post-war period – and in this way they off set their sufferings against the suffering of the victims of the Nazi regime.[13] The refusal to speak about the crimes committed by Germans often goes along with accusations against other nations: Like England for bombing the town of Dresden, or the Americans for their unfair post-war justice, or the former Soviet Union for massacres committed by the Red Army. In general, all three generations of non-Jewish Germans demonstrate a tendency of preferring not to occupy themselves with their own guilt. They rather see the past and present guilt of the victims, or they deal with the Allies and their own suffering during the war and the post-war period, than with the guilt of the Nazi perpetrators, especially if members of their own family fall into this group.

These strategies correspond with the public discourse, which means with these justifications families of perpetrators get the support of German society. Besides the often observed strategy of blaming the genocide on the Jews – blaming the victims for the crimes committed against them – all those who put disturbing questions are being accused too, and these may be the family's children or grandchildren.

3. The descendants themselves take on the *feelings of guilt*, and torment themselves with the question of their own potential of perpetrating such crimes. This mechanism is often observed in sons and daughters of Nazi perpetrators, who do not ask themselves the question of guilt.[14]
4. We could observe that there are a lot of children and grandchildren with fears of being murdered, which in some cases intensifies into a genuine *fear of extermination*. Children and grandchildren of perpetrators express, like Uli Sonntag, fears of being murdered by their parents or grandparents, if they attempt to expose the family past. We also observe a fear of being considered 'unworthy of life'. Thus, for instance, the daughter of a Nazi euthanasia physician felt this fear as a child in connection with her father and concealed her shortsightedness from him for this reason.[15]

5. The children and grandchildren suffer from extremely detailed *fantasies* relating to the undisclosed family history or family secrets. Our analyses clearly show that these fantasies correspond, in form and content, in a striking way to the specific experiences of the grandparents' generation. In the Sonntag family, the son Eberhard and also the grandson Uli are, in their fantasies, occupied with the theme of fire and burning people. The son Eberhard does not want to think about his father's past; however, he continues to ask 'burning' questions with regard to his own life story; he is preoccupied with whether he could bring himself to murder people. In his fantasies he is putting himself in the position of the commanding officer and ponders whether he himself would be able to drive children and women into a church and set it on fire. He subsequently concludes that, though he does not think he could, he 'wouldn't put my hand in the fire to prove' that he would not. We also find in his life history that he is fascinated by fire and the idea of burning himself. The grandson Uli has a pronounced fear of fire. For example: He has a recurrent dream that he is in his old childhood bedroom, that it is on fire and he cannot get out of the room. He also visualizes himself burning in the pyre of the KZ Stutthof, sees himself together with other bodies on the pile of corpses.[16] While his father imagines himself in the role of someone giving the order to burn women and children, the grandson in his dreams and fantasies visualizes himself in the role of the victim threatened with death by fire, and also in the role of a child being locked in a burning room.

   In how far are these fantasies around the theme 'burning of people' connected with the hidden family history? When we look at the grandfather's interview, it is obvious that he, too, is occupied with the burning of corpses and the theme of 'piles of corpses'. He speaks about photographs, which the Allies showed to him and the other prisoners during his imprisonment in Dachau, and argues that these photos were faked. He wonders how there could still have been so many corpses left after 1945, arguing that they had tried to burn them all. It begs the question of whether the burning of corpses was connected to the Nazi crimes that he was accused of, as well as with his work as a government building surveyor in the Munich *Luftgaukommando*. In connection with our archive research, the question that occurs to us as the interpreters, is whether Mr Sonntag, as an architect, had something to do with the construction of crematoria in the concentration camps – like perhaps in the Dachau concentration camp, located near Munich.

The dialogue in a family of survivors

Let us now change our perspective and consider the dialogue in a family of survivors. Noam (born in 1954) is the second son of Lena und Amos Goldstern.[17] His parents survived the Lodz Ghetto, the death-camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other concentration camps. Imagine the following situation[18]: At about fourteen years of age – about the same age as Ulrike Sonntag was – Noam has an argument with his mother. He refuses to eat, blames his mother for forcing him to eat so much. His mother gets very upset, starts to shout, Noam still refuses to eat, his mother starts screaming hysterically, talks something about Auschwitz, about the doctors there,

and begins to thrash Noam. Then she stops suddenly, shocked at her own behavior, runs into the bedroom and collapses on the bed, fainting. Noam's father is called home from work, a doctor has to be sent for, Noam's mother is given sedatives and has to be put in psychiatric care for a while afterwards.

In his interview some years ago, Noam explicitly asserts that he refused to take the blame his parents laid on him for the incident. However, his repeated justifications indicate how much this incident has weighed on him:

> I thought I wasn't the cause of this. I told them I'm not to blame for it. She has problems with her nerves, but you blame me but it's not me. Even now I still don't feel guilty about what happened 'cause I still know that it wasn't me [...] she repressed it for X years and it had to come out.

As Noam says, 'it had to come out', though it probably came out almost entirely pre-verbally, through screaming and weeping, and in a few fragmented sentences. Noam also remarks in his interview: 'The whole story of the doctors came out.' Based on our case reconstruction we assume that Noam, on a conscious level, does not know what exactly the story of the doctors is about. However, we got some hints about this in the interview with his mother. Lena's life story is very fragmentary and it is very difficult to reconstruct the chronology – she gives more hints than clearly narrated stories. One of the fragmentary stories she recounts is about the time she spent in the infirmary in one of Auschwitz's outlying sub-camps for six or seven months. This story is still bound up with a great deal of fear, which can be sensed when Lena tells it. One of the things she says is that a 'doctor' threatened to kill her if she screamed. Lena's story contains a lot of hints – particularly in reference to that doctor – and listening to her, one senses that more happened at the time than she can share with us now. Sexual violence emerges between the lines, combined with a sense of gratitude towards this 'doctor'. We must bear in mind, too, that Lena may have been the victim of medical experiments.

Nothing of this, however, is being spoken of in the family. In the main, Lena's Shoah past is being kept a family secret. Yet both her sons, Noam among them, sense something of it, though not consciously. He speaks with embarrassment and a great deal of sensitivity about the persecution in his mother's past when she was a young girl:

> I know she went through experiences that weren't very nice and maybe that's why she doesn't want to talk about them (4). Because she went through the Holocaust at a very young age, as a child of 14, 15, she really lost all her youth there [...] at that age when she was becoming a woman, the experiences she went through weren't nice. [...] Imagine a child who's an adolescent, imagine if you take a fourteen-year-old girl and stand her up, take her clothes off and shave the hair off her head in front of a gang of lunatics. It's not exactly an experience that can leave a person sane.

The image of how his mother and the other women in Auschwitz had to take off their clothes is one that Noam is especially preoccupied with. He says that this was one of the few things his mother has told him, but adds that she never went into detail about it, presumably because she is ashamed of it. We assume that Noam senses something

of his mother's 'shame-filled' experiences in the infirmary. But like his brother, he is afraid of finding out more about this past and he admits quite openly: 'The truth is that I asked questions and got answers but I don't remember them.'

His brother Joel (born in 1949) also lives so much in the shadow of this past that to some degree he has had to split off from it emotionally. When asked in the interview about how he reacted to his mother's breakdowns, he replied: 'I closed myself off and [...] like an ostrich you could say, I put up a wall around myself.' Even if his parents have hardly spoken to him about the atrocious events they experienced, the mark that the persecution in his parents' past left was ever-present for him and his brother. Joel expresses this as follows: 'It was a life in a house that is the Shoah, with some envelope containing pictures hidden deep deep in- ...' Joel grew up with his father crying out 'Mama, Mama' at night, and his mother waking him and calming him down. But he tried, as he puts it, to play deaf and when the subject came up: 'I tried not to be part of these conversations. I always tried to sit in the corner, to put up some kind of barrier, not to hear.'

But Joel – like his brother – is ambivalent in wanting to know something about the past of his parents, and he is afraid of it. They became quite obvious in the family interview with his parents.[19] Joel took the initiative for the family to be interviewed, wanting to open up the family dialogue. The analysis of the interview shows, however, that every participant expected someone else to take the initiative, at the same time fearing what the dialogue might lead to. Joel delivered veritable 'propaganda speeches' stressing the importance of the future and claiming it would be preferable to remain silent about the past. His father obstructed the dialogue. Repeatedly, he accused his son of lack of interest and actually maneuvered him into this position; but he primarily attempted to keep the mother from talking. Everyone was afraid that by bringing up the past, he or she would put a burden on other family members. Amos and Lena, on the one hand, wish to talk about the past with their sons, now that they are grown up; on the other hand, they want to spare them the experience of learning about their family's history. Their son wants to talk to his parents, but is afraid this might be too much of a burden for them. A number of excerpts from the family interview indicate, however, that Lena would like to talk about her persecution experiences but needs support if she is to do this.

Let's look at a short segment of the family interview.[20] The parents start out by talking about the fact that they have told their children the story of the persecution they suffered. The father then makes the following observation concerning his son, turning to me: '[German] I believe my son does not understand this; [English] I never talk about the Holocaust.' The mother now remarks, also turning to me: '[G] I never have talked (3) about the Holocaust; that is in here.' She touches her chest while uttering the last four words. I now ask the son: '[E] How is it for you to listen now to your parents?' To which he replies: '[E] I think it is my first time that I will – we sitting together and talking about the Holocaust, because it was let's say a see-see-.' The mother completes his sentence saying: '[G] Taboo.' The son perhaps wanted to say 'secret' but the mother completed his sentence by saying 'Taboo.' While a taboo is expressed in prohibitions, a secret is not necessarily.

With some resistance from Amos, we could support the mother in telling her son something about her traumatic experiences in the Lodz Ghetto, and reading some

of her memories in Polish. On the eve of our conversation she had put her painful memories on paper. As we already had learnt in the single interview with Lena, she has recurrent images in her mind of scenes in the Lodz Ghetto, where Germans threw small children out of the window onto open trucks waiting below.[21] Also in the family interviews she talked about the 24-hour curfew during which children were taken from their parents. What this has to do with her own family, she had written down the night before and she read it mainly addressed to the son:

> [Polish] Later the Germans came to our house and got the small children. They broke down the wall, searched for gold, and left things in a terrible mess [12 seconds Pause]. We took in a child. My mother had accepted that child from a woman who had two children. My mother accepted that child and they got her, too. That was the worst thing you could possibly see- how they took that child away from her mother and then threw her out the window.

Joel, who translated this read passage of the mother for us in the interview, however, did not mention this fragment of his mother's traumatic experience: His grandmother had to surrender a child that had been entrusted to her to her murderers. We assume, he cannot fully admit to himself that this family incident happened. Neither can he accept the emotional significance of the fact that mothers were unable to protect their children, or even today might be unable to do so. Nevertheless, *as all interviews in this family showed*, the theme of 'the murder of children in the Lodz ghetto' was always present, even though nobody talked about it openly. In this family the past weighs so heavily on the family members that they have to keep silent about it. However, the family interview gave us the impression of being the first step toward opening up a dialogue in the family.

Also in this family it is the grandson, Ronen (born in 1973), the son of Joel, who is reflecting the emotional consequences of the closed family dialogue, saying: 'The emotional issue is an issue all of its own, a mystery.' He says that his father passed on his grandparents' values to him, those of suppressing feelings and keeping problems to oneself. Different from his father, he is able to talk openly about his fears. He says that he suffered from fear of heights and claustrophobia. It was striking in the interview that Ronen claimed he could hardly remember anything that happened in his childhood, but he did remember the following situation. When he was a small boy his aunt wanted to cure him of his fear of heights. She took him out on to a balcony, held him up by the legs, and shook him in the air and pretended she was going to drop him over. Ronen evaluates this memory as follows: 'it is strange... she [the aunt] is a person that I felt good with...' We might ask ourselves at this point whether there is a connection between Ronen's phobia and the untold story of his grandmother's: That of throwing children out of the window in the Lodz Ghetto? It is remarkable that his father Joel had chosen to join the parachutist unit in the Israeli Army. So he could learn how to survive a fall from great heights, secured by a parachute.

Similarities and Differences

Lets now compare this family dialogue with the dialogue in a family of Nazi-perpetrators.

1. Family secrets and fantasies
The silence surrounding the past that has institutionalized itself within perpetrator families also extends to families of those who were persecuted.[22] Moreover, in both kinds of families, one may observe the tremendous impact of family secrets. Family secrets constitute some of the most effective mechanisms ensuring a continued impact of the threatening family past. This can be more generally formulated as: The more closed or guarded the family dialogue, or the greater the attempt to make a secret of or whitewash the past, the more sustained the impact of the family past will be on the second or third generation.[23] Parts of the family past are not being told in the families – but, through messages between the lines, they still manage to be transmitted to the descendants. And the descendants in both types of families develop fantasies relating to the hidden part of the families' past.[24]

However, the family secrets differ both in *content* and in their *function* within the families. Secrets in survivor families are connected with situations of dehumanization or with guilt feelings. Sexual violence, too, will usually belong to the untold stories (as does the murder of children). Repeatedly, the women in the interviews we conducted, dropped unmistakable hints of sexual violence or addressed the theme of experiences they themselves had gone through by telling stories about what had happened to other women who had experienced the same thing.[25] Secrets in perpetrator families are connected with situations in which they themselves persecuted or killed others or were witnesses of crimes.

The functions of untold stories are also different. If survivors like Lena refuse to articulate parts of their past, one of their reasons for choosing not to do so is an attempt to protect their children and grandchildren from the fantasies and nightmares that haunt them. In contrast, grandparents or parents who were implicated in Nazi crimes primarily deny the past in order to protect themselves from accusation and also from loss of affection. There is also a great difference in the family dynamics: Survivors are not denying the persecution in their past. They do not deny having been imprisoned in camps, whereas Nazi perpetrators deny their involvement in crimes and furthermore, in correspondence with the public discourse, they present themselves as victims of the Nazi-period or the Second World War. This is being transmitted to their children and grandchildren, who very often also present their family history as a history of victims.

2. Guilt feelings
Guilt feelings are very central for the psycho dynamics of descendants of both perpetrators and survivors. Whereas descendants of perpetrators feel guilty on behalf of their parents and grandparents or let themselves be talked into feeling guilty for falsely accusing their parents or grandparents – the descendants of survivors' families feel guilty for being unable to make their parents or grandparents' past go away or for not helping them more to have a better life. These guilt feelings,

> include the pressure to compensate parents with naches (happiness) for their suffering, through accomplishment; a desire to protect and care for parents; a deep sadness and pain awakened by Holocaust memories; and feelings of powerlessness to undo the Holocaust for their parents.[26]

While the perpetrators attempt to deflect responsibility by blaming both the victims and their own children and grandchildren, survivors continue to be plagued by guilt for having survived. They repeatedly accuse themselves of having abandoned their parents and for having failed to help others in certain situations, they also torment themselves asking why they only thought of themselves during 'selection procedures' instead of thinking of those who were being sent to their death in the gas chamber.

3. Fear of extermination

A fear of being murdered, which in some cases intensifies into a genuine fear of extermination, is something we find in children and grandchildren of both perpetrators and survivors. Fear of extermination in children and grandchildren of perpetrators tends to relate to an unconscious fantasy of being murdered by their own parents, while the potential threat that children and grandchildren of survivors feel tends to be a general anxiety towards the extra-familial and non-Jewish world. Descendants of survivors often become afraid in situations, which they – often unconsciously – associate with the persecution in their relatives' past. For instance, one hears of them becoming mortally afraid of being gassed when they enter unknown or confined spaces. In many cases such fears have to do with the fact that these persons imagine themselves as inmates of concentration camps or subject to exterminations together with their relatives. Even as a child, Noam Goldstern for example, used to imagine himself in a concentration camp together with his parents. He also talks about his father's escape in the last few days before the liberation. He tries to physically feel what he thinks they must have felt, and in his imagination he can hear and sense the watchdogs behind, that had been set on him.

Conclusion

The comparison showed: At first glance, we can observe similarities when comparing ways of dealing with the traumatic past during National Socialism within families of survivors and families of Nazi persecutors. Behind these manifest similarities at a superficial level, however, lies the level of the latent deep structure, which in each case is constituted differently by the concrete experience of the family past. In other words, no matter how strong the superficial similarities, their function within the family system, and – more specifically, their psychological effect on individual family members – continue to be divergent based on the differences in the respective family pasts.

The comparison also shows clearly for all families, how collective history can affect family and life histories over several generations. This implies for our empirical work: We need to know the family history, in order to understand the biographies we are studying.

Notes

1 G. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Holocaust in Three-Generations. Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi-Regime*, London, 1998. An earlier longer version of the article is published in: *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly, Special Issue: Family History – Life Story* 7, 2002, pp. 225-238. This publication is with permission from Elsevier.

2 The study was done under the aegis of Fritz Schütze (University of Magdeburg, FRG) and Regine Gildermeister (University of Tübingen, FRG) and in cooperation with Dan Bar-On (Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel).

3 For this interview technique see G. Rosenthal, *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte. Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen*, Frankfurt, 1995. G. Rosenthal, 'The Healing Effects of Storytelling. On the Conditions of Curative Storytelling in the Context of Research and Counseling', in *Qualitative Inquiry* (forthcoming). F. Schütze, 'Zur Hervorlockung und Analyse von Erzählungen thematisch relevanter Geschichten im Rahmen soziologischer Feldforschung', in Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen (ed.), *Kommunikative Sozialforschung*, Munich, 1976, pp. 159-260. The method used here to analyze narrated family and life stories is one of hermeneutical case reconstruction developed by the author over many years in combination with various other methods. G. Rosenthal, 'Reconstruction of life stories. Principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews', in *The Narrative Study of Lives*, 1, (1), 1993, pp. 59-91. G. Rosenthal, 'Biographical Method – Biographical Research', in Seale C., Gobo G., Gubrium J. F. and Silverman D. (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice* (forthcoming).

4 Dan Bar-On's empirical findings are widely concurrent with ours. D. Bar-On, *Fear and Hope. Three Generations of the Holocaust*, Cambridge, 1995.

5 The following discussion of this case study is result-oriented, i.e. the process of interpretation cannot be reconstructed here. For more details about this family see G. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Holocaust in Three-Generations. Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi-Regime*, London, 1998, pp. 249-264.

6 The situation is a construction made by the author; mainly based on the interview with the daughter but in correspondence with (or with the proof of) the results of the case analysis, especially with the interview of the father. In this family we interviewed the grandmother, the grandfather, the son, the daughter, and two grandchildren.

7 All names and several biographical data have been changed to protect their identity.

8 The latter promotion occurred in 1944 at a time when few buildings were being commissioned with three exceptions: barracks, storerooms, etc. for the *Wehrmacht*, barracks for the SS, and extensions to concentration camps.

9 Quotation from the interview with Otto Sonntag.

10 Quotation from the interview with Ulrike Sonntag.

11 This situation is told by Uli. We have a lot of proof for his perception – also in the letters his grandfather wrote to him we find similar accusations.

12 See M.A. Karpel, 'Family secrets', in *Family Process*, 19, 1980, pp. 295-306.

13 G. Rosenthal (ed.), *Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nichts mehr zu tun', Zur Gegenwärtigkeit des "Dritten Reiches" in erzählten Lebensgeschichten*, Opladen, 1990. G. Rosenthal, 'German War Memories: Narrability and the Biographical and Social Functions of Remembering', in *Oral History*, 19, (2), 1991, pp. 39-40.

14 See also D. Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence*, Cambridge, 1989.

15 G. Rosenthal and D. Bar-On, 'A biographical case study of a victimizer's daughter', in *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 2, (2), 1992, pp. 105-127. Cf. as to the brutality of Nazi perpetrators against their own children: Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence*. J. Kestenberg and M. Kestenberg, 'Child killing and child rescuing', in Neuman G. (ed.), *Origins of Human Aggression*, New York, 1987, pp. 139-154. Rosenthal G., 'Transgenerationelle Spätfolgen der nationalsozialistischen Familienvergangenheit', in *Die Psychotherapeutin. Zeitschrift für Psychotherapie*. Bonn, 9, 1998, pp. 71-87.

16 During the typhus epidemic at the end of 1944/beginning of 1945, the crematorium in Stutthof did not have the capacity to burn all the bodies, so a pyre was constructed to the north of the New Camp. Skutnik T., *Stutthof. Historischer Informator*, Danzig, 1979, p. 22.

17 For more details about this family, see Rosenthal G. (ed.), *The Holocaust in Three-Generations*, pp. 51-68.

18 The situation is told by Noam.

19 See more detailed discussion of the family interview in G. Rosenthal(ed.), *The Holocaust in Three-Generations*.

20 I conducted this interview with my Israeli colleague Tamar Zilberman.

21 One of the most painful chapters in the history of the ghetto Lodz was what was known as the '*Kinderaktion*' (Children Roundup). In September 1942, when Lena was fifteen years old, the Germans demanded that all children under the age of ten be put on transports. D. Dabrowska and L. Dobroszycki, *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto 1941-1944,* New Haven and London, 1986.

22 Y. Danieli, 'Families of Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust: Some short- and long-term effects', in Spiegelberger C. and Srasaso I. (eds), *Stress & Anxiety, Series in Clinical & Community Psychology*, 8, New York, 1982, pp. 405-421.
23 Bar-On, *Fear and Hope*.
24 Cf. N.C. Auerhahn and E. Prelinger, 'Repetition in the concentration camp survivor and her child', in *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 10, 1983, pp. 31-45. S. Davidson, 'The clinical effects of massive psychic trauma in families of Holocaust survivors', in *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 6, (1), 1980, pp. 11-21.
25 G. Rosenthal, 'Sexuelle Gewalt in Kriegs- und Verfolgungszeiten', in Fröse M. and Volpp-Teuscher I, (eds) *Krieg, Geschlecht und Traumatisierung*, Frankfurt, 1999, pp. 25-56.
26 F. Klein-Parker, 'Dominant Attitudes of Adult Children of Holocaust Survivors toward Their Parents', in Wilson J., Harel Z. and Kahana B. (eds), *Human Adaption to Extreme Stress*, New York, 1988, pp. 193-218, p. 208.

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